

Divergent Thinking and the “Contrarian” Guide to Innovation



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Presenters

Gundolf Graml, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs,
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Elaine Meyer-Lee, Provost and Senior Vice President
for Academic Affairs, Goucher College (MD)

Chair

Gregor Thuswaldner, Professor and former Provost & Executive
Vice President (2020–2024), Whitworth University (WA)

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Session Overview

- Framework from Steven Sample
- Examples of thinking free
- Small group workshopping of ideas for innovation
- Sharing takeaways



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Inspired by Steven B. Sample

- From *The Contrarian's Guide to Leadership* (2002)
 - Cultivating “intellectual independence” while also seeing through the others’ eyes
 - About 30% of a senior leader’s times should be protected for thinking & inspiring
 - Focus on hiring excellent people and forging them into an effective team
 - Never make a decision that can reasonably be delegated, or that is beyond your scope of authority
 - Think free: “first allow your mind to contemplate really outrageous ideas and only subsequently apply the constraints of practicality, legality, cost, time, and ethics”
 - A benefit of newness
 - Imagination, creativity, courage to think in new ways, more art than science, but one’s own--can’t copy anyone else’s approach or a theory of leadership



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Examples in action

Elaine

- Women's Entrepreneurship Initiative
- Sophomore Class Atlanta Leadership Experience

Gundolf

- Imagining new Global Learning Curriculum
- "Bending in the opposite direction" – the difficulty of letting go



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Workshopping innovative ideas in groups

- From *Imagination: A Manifesto* by Ruha Benjamin (2024)
- Quotes Kelly Hayes “A lot of things people say ‘cannot be done’ have not been meaningfully attempted in our context of lifetimes. It’s easy to maintain myths of impossibility when you crush all experiments”
- Propose something with which you’d like to experiment and then ask each other:
 - What are the guiding principles animating your vision?
 - How does it transform old patterns and seed new ones?
 - How is it desirable?
 - How is it viable—could you sustain and iterate from it?
 - How is it achievable considering the relative stakeholder power, strategies, and skills? Who is included and excluded?



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Sharing takeaways or ideas



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**Thank you for attending
this session!**



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